

CHAMBERS'S JOURNAL

OF
POPULAR

LITERATURE, SCIENCE, AND ART

Fourth Series

CONDUCTED BY WILLIAM AND ROBERT CHAMBERS.

No. 441.

SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 1872.

PRICE 1½d.

A NEW METHOD OF CHOOSING A WIFE.

IN the little town of Oakhill lived Dr Topgrass and his three unmarried daughters, the eldest of whom was twenty-eight. The doctor had been seven years a widower, and although he had attained the advanced age of fifty-five, it was generally believed that he only wanted to see some of his daughters married, before he introduced a second Mrs Topgrass to Oakhill. But what did it avail that Adelaide was handsome, that Julia sung like a nightingale, and that Maggie was sprightly, piquante, and fun-loving? There were only two unmarried men of their own degree in Oakhill, one an attorney of sixty, the other a young clergyman believed to be already engaged. In the outskirts of the town stood a handsome villa, which had for some time remained unlet, but one day Dr Topgrass communicated to his daughters the interesting intelligence, that the house had been taken by a wealthy bachelor in search of a wife.

'But how do you know, papa, that he is in search of a wife?' asked Adelaide, the eldest girl.

'It appears to be an understood fact, my dear; I cannot tell how it has been ascertained.'

'Well, if he is in search of a wife, I think we should all be as coy as the source of the Nile,' said Maggie, the youngest.

'Or the North-west Passage,' suggested Julia.

'No, I wouldn't compare myself to that,' said Maggie, 'for it was worth nothing after all.'

'Mr Bitteresk's house—by-the-way, that is his name,' remarked the doctor—'is very handsomely furnished, I am told; and he appears to be a man of superior education and refined tastes, to judge from the number of books and pictures he is said to possess.'

'You will call upon him, I suppose, papa?' asked Adelaide.

'Certainly. One ought always to be attentive to strangers,' replied the doctor, with a show of hospitality which deceived no one but himself. 'Besides,' he added, 'the society of such a man will be an acquisition. I have to pass his door this

very afternoon, in visiting poor Mr Smith; I don't see why I shouldn't call at once.'

The sisters were painfully aware of the selfish motive which actuated their father in the present instance; and the interest which, in other circumstances, they might have taken in the arrival of a stranger in the quiet little town, where life was wearily monotonous, was embittered by the consideration, that their sole remaining parent was ready to give the warmest welcome to any man who would relieve him of the burden of one of his daughters.

'Papa doesn't care a bit what sort of husbands we get, if we only get homes of our own, so that he may have no further trouble with us,' remarked Adelaide bitterly.

'I don't think he would let us marry very poor men,' returned Maggie, looking up from the music she was copying.

'O yes, he would, if they were gentlemen. Did you not see how he frowned when you spoke of being coy as the source of the Nile? What right have we to any maidenly reserve! We must get out of papa's way as fast as we can.'

'Indeed, we must,' said Julia with a sigh, as she arranged some flowers in a vase. 'If one of us doesn't marry this Mr Bitteresk, papa will be extremely cross. After all, only one of us can marry him, and the rest must submit to a step-mother.'

'If papa would marry a middle-aged woman, I shouldn't mind so much,' observed Maggie; 'but it is always girls of seventeen he pays attention to; and to see a girl brought into the house three years younger than myself, would be extremely unpleasant.'

A few days after the preceding conversation, the Misses Topgrass sat in the drawing-room expecting company, for Mr Bitteresk and a few other gentlemen were invited to dinner. The important guest was the first to arrive. He was a man of forty, of middle height, clumsy in shape, and not at all good-looking. When Adelaide advanced to meet him, Mr Bitteresk fixed his eyes attentively upon her countenance, and appeared for some seconds

quite unable to withdraw his gaze. Slightly embarrassed, yet at the same time flattered by this tribute to her beauty, Adelaide presented their guest to her sisters, whom he greeted in a somewhat formal manner. He now seated himself near Miss Topgrass, and while he permitted her to maintain the conversation with very little assistance on his part, his earnest contemplation of her features was believed, not only by the young lady herself, but also by her sisters, to have but one interpretation. When Dr Topgrass, who had been unavoidably detained by professional duty, entered the room, he engaged for a short time the attention of his guest; but Adelaide remarked with satisfaction, that, even while conversing with her father, Mr Bitteresk's eye more than once sought her face. Other guests arrived, and for a few minutes Adelaide was occupied with their reception; but when it was time to enter the dining-room, Mr Bitteresk gave her his arm; and while he occupied the seat at her right hand, he directed his conversation exclusively to her. If, for a few moments, the attention due to other guests induced Adelaide to make a remark to the gentleman on her left hand, or to listen with an air of enjoyment to some lively sally on the part of a young man at the other end of the table, she was aware that she was all the time subjected to the earnest gaze of Mr Bitteresk, who appeared to have no desire to speak to any one else, and waited patiently till she was ready to talk to him again. Adelaide would have preferred a younger and handsomer admirer; but she reflected that true affection was not to be despised, especially when accompanied by a comfortable income.

'O my goodness, Adelaide, you *have* made a conquest!' cried Maggie, when the young ladies left the dining-room.

'But could you care for him?' asked Julia. 'He is the thickest man I ever saw.'

'Julia, you'll be an old maid,' said Adelaide.

'I know I shall; but I could never marry a man who was not my ideal.'

'But think of the step-mother who is sure to come!'

'I do think of it, but nothing could induce me to marry one I did not absolutely adore.'

'Well, Julia, you're not an old maid yet,' said Maggie, 'and our dreaded step-mamma is still only a being of the imagination. Let us be happy while we may. I feel in a mood for dancing; come and have a waltz.'

'Shall I play for you?' asked Adelaide.

'No, no; go and think of Mr Bitteresk. The first moments of falling in love must be delightful,' replied Julia. 'We can hum a tune for ourselves.'

So the two younger sisters danced, and Adelaide stood in the window recess watching, in sentimental mood, the fleeting clouds. At that moment, Mr Bitteresk entered the room unperceived by the sisters. Julia's pretty golden hair had escaped from the comb, and hung in not ungraceful confusion on her shoulders, while her usually pale face, flushed with the exercise, was of a most lovely

pink hue. Maggie, that she might not be incommoded with her long dress, had taken it right up over her arm, so that her pretty feet and ankles were exposed to view. Whatever interest such a scene might have possessed for some men, it had none for Mr Bitteresk, who, discovering Adelaide at the window, went straight towards her, when the dancers suddenly observing him, Maggie gave a little scream, and threw down her dress, and Julia rushed from the room to put up her hair. Of all this, Mr Bitteresk appeared to see nothing, but taking a seat near Adelaide, gazed intently on her lovely features. That her sister and her admirer might talk without fear of being overheard, Maggie sat down before the piano and played some lively airs; but Mr Bitteresk's admiration was speechless, and Adelaide acknowledged to herself that there were moments of intense feeling when words were mere folly. But as modesty forbade her returning, or even meeting his tender regards, she dropped her eyes, feeling how true to nature were the lines of the Scottish poet:

For when ye look sae sair at me,
I daurna look at you.

'Miss Topgrass, may I ask the favour of being permitted to look at your eyes?' said Mr Bitteresk. 'Oh, really!' cried Adelaide, raising her blushing face to his, and, in her modesty, immediately withdrawing it.

'Do let me look at them,' he entreated, as he drew his chair closer to hers. 'Withdraw not your eyes from mine, I implore.'

'But, Mr Bitteresk, we are not alone,' said Adelaide, averting her head in confusion. 'Besides, our acquaintance is so slight.'

Undeterred by these words, he continued to plead that her face might be turned towards him. Adelaide bashfully complied; and he gazed long and earnestly into her orbs of blue. The other gentlemen now entered the room, and Julia was requested to sing. This she did in such a manner as to charm every one but Mr Bitteresk, who could not be diverted, even for a moment, from her whose beauty seemed to enthrall him. When, with the other guests, the stranger rose to take leave, Adelaide expected that he would have spoken some word of tenderness, but he only shook hands, cast

One last, long, lingering look behind,

and turned away.

'I really think, Adelaide, you have made an impression on Mr Bitteresk,' remarked the doctor, when the last guest had departed, and he took up his candlestick to retire to his chamber. 'He paid you marked attention.'

Next day, Mr Bitteresk called, and sat an hour and a half with the young ladies; but though he was for some time alone with Adelaide, he said nothing indicative of the state of his affections, but contemplated the fair face of that lady with the same air of being completely fascinated which he had on the previous evening displayed. Two hours later Adelaide's friend, Annie Dunbar, made a call, and the chief subject of her conversation was the stranger, Mr Bitteresk.

'He's the oddest creature I ever saw,' she remarked; 'and he stares so rudely. Papa brought him in to supper the night before last, and I assure you he never took his eyes off my face.'

This was an overwhelming statement, but the sisters were too well bred to betray their feelings. Maggie adroitly diverted the talk into another channel, and it was not till the visitor had taken leave that they expressed their sentiments upon the observation she had made.

'Don't believe a word of it, Adelaide. She's a conceited girl, Annie Dunbar; I always thought so,' remarked Julia.

'Stare at *her*, indeed! with her turned-up nose, and dowdy appearance,' exclaimed Maggie: 'a likely story, truly!'

Adelaide admitted the thing was improbable, and for two days her mind was at rest on this point; but on the third, she was doomed to be an eye-witness of the inconstancy of her admirer. It was Sunday; and when the sisters entered their place in church, Adelaide's pulse quickened on seeing Mr Bitteresk already there. The pew was a square one; and as the young ladies seated themselves, it so happened that Maggie, being the last to come in, got a seat exactly opposite Mr Bitteresk. As soon as the sermon began, Maggie perceived that the eyes of him she regarded as her sister's admirer were fixed upon herself. She tried to look at the clergyman, but it was impossible to refrain from an occasional glance at Mr Bitteresk; and each time she looked at him she found, to her embarrassment, that he regarded her not only intently, but even anxiously. At the close of the service, Mr Bitteresk, after shaking hands with the sisters, contrived to get close to Maggie in leaving the church. He also walked part of the way home with her, and though he did not say much, he looked volumes.

'He's a flirt; I understand him now perfectly,' said Adelaide that afternoon; 'and I think it very likely he did pay attention to Annie Dunbar.'

'Think of the impudence of a clumsy fellow like that being a flirt!' exclaimed Maggie; 'I always expect ugly men to be highly virtuous, to be the soul of honour and fidelity, and to be unselfish, and generous, and all that's good. When a handsome man is fickle, I think he has been spoiled with the attentions of women; but when an ugly man is inconstant, there is no excuse for him.'

'You mean plain-looking men, Maggie,' observed Julia. 'There are no ugly men, in my estimation, except those in whose countenances mental or moral defect is portrayed; and you don't expect such men to be good.'

With a look of vexation, Adelaide went into the garden, and walked round the flower-borders for two hours. She then came in, and with an effort to be magnanimous, said to her youngest sister: 'Maggie, if you like to encourage him, dear, don't refrain from doing so on my account. I do feel a little bit chagrined, I confess, but I shall get over it. I did somehow expect—though perhaps unreasonably—that when Mr Bitteresk had none of the graces of person, he would have solid virtues.'

'Indeed, I shan't encourage him. Do you think I could care for a man who had disappointed you, Adelaide? No, indeed; although I do wish I could get out of the house before papa marries a baby, and I become a female Hamlet.'

Tea-parties were much in fashion in Oakhill, and it was a customary thing when the party was to be a small one, to invite only two of the Misses

Topgrass; on some occasions the family was represented by one only. A few days after the discovery of Mr Bitteresk's inconstancy, Maggie was invited to drink tea at the house of Mrs Elmut, the banker's wife. Besides herself, there were five young ladies, the unmarried attorney, the young clergyman, and Mr Bitteresk. The former gentlemen understood the duties of their position too well to pay particular attention to any one lady, making, by an equal distribution of their civilities, the paucity of beaux less felt than it might have been. But Mr Bitteresk was oblivious of all but Maggie, whom he regarded so intently, that it occurred to her she might be in some danger of falling into a mesmeric sleep. After tea, a game at croquet was proposed, and Maggie hoped this diversion would afford her an escape from the sedulous attention of one who had already proved himself a trifler with the affections of women. But Mr Bitteresk, completely indifferent to the game, followed her from hoop to hoop; and although the object of his regard never once addressed him, and in every way shewed a decided disinclination for his society, it appeared to afford him entire satisfaction to stand by her side, and silently contemplate her features. Such devotion did not escape the observation of Mrs Elmut and her other guests, who were all amiably disposed towards the enamoured swain, and desirous to give him an opportunity of holding private converse with his beloved. The game over, Maggie and another young lady, accompanied by Mr Bitteresk, strolled towards the river which flowed past the end of the garden.

'Oh, look at the forget-me-nots, Clara!' exclaimed Maggie, pointing to a tuft of those pretty little flowers which grew close to the water. 'I must have some.'

'Allow me to get them for you, Miss Maggie,' said Mr Bitteresk, stepping down into the mud for that purpose, while Maggie bent over the bank watching him.

'Oh, what a mess his boots are in! I never thought the mud was so soft. Did you?' observed Maggie in a whisper to her friend; but on looking round, she found, to her surprise, that she was alone. Clara was in Mr Bitteresk's interest, and as soon as she had found Maggie's attention diverted from herself, had taken that opportunity to move quietly away. When Mr Bitteresk presented the flowers, Maggie, in common courtesy, could not avoid meeting his eye as she thanked him; when all at once it struck her that there was an expression of honesty in the man's face, combined, it may be, with eccentricity. Having conceived this idea, a desire to know something more of such an odd character prevented her immediately hastening to join the others, and she stood looking at the flowers, reflecting that no insincere person ever had an honest eye, and that the countenance was a much more safe guide to the character than the manner, or even the conduct, on certain occasions. A philanthropist who devotes his time and fortune to lessen the ills of humanity, may be seen to refuse alms to a street-beggar, to whom the extravagant and selfish man of fashion, too careless to pay his tradesmen's bills, will lightly fling a silver coin. The misanthrope and the man of genial, sympathetic nature may, in a particular case, act alike, or, it may be, even seem to exchange characters.

'Miss Maggie, may I take the liberty of?—

Maggie was standing between Mr Bitteresk and the river, and, as he said these words, he approached more closely to her, so that she instinctively drew back, and was in dangerous proximity to the water before she heard the conclusion of the sentence—'of—touching the point of your nose?'

Relieved, surprised, and amused, Maggie repeated: 'To touch the point of my nose! Oh! Mr Bitteresk, how absurd!'

'Am I to understand that you allow me to do so?'

'Yes, of course; do it, if you like.'

Thus permitted, Mr Bitteresk felt the feature referred to very carefully, and with evident meditation.

'Thank you, Miss Maggie. Your good-nature emboldens me to ask a further favour. Allow me to touch your hair?'

Maggie thought this a much more lover-like request, and as she was now diverted with the oddity of her admirer, she granted him that permission also; but the critical manner in which he drew his hand over her pretty brown tresses, and the cool reflection displayed in his eye, suggested to her the idea that her eccentric companion must have made his money at wig-making, and that he regarded her locks, not from a lover-like, but from a mercantile point of view. This notion was unpleasant, and thinking she had been quite long enough alone with an individual so *outré*, Maggie, accompanied by Mr Bitteresk, re-entered the house. For the remainder of the evening, she carefully avoided giving her admirer any further opportunity of addressing her, and returned home greatly puzzled as to what his intentions might be. Out of consideration for Adelaide, Maggie refrained from mentioning Mr Bitteresk's attentions to herself; but she soon discovered that she was not the only one towards whom the eccentric stranger had acted in an extraordinary manner. Miss Brown, a lady 'on the heavenly side of forty,' had been greatly displeased by his asking permission to touch her hair. One day, when Miss Brown's grievance was mentioned by the doctor, as he sat with his family at dinner, Maggie related her own experience of Mr Bitteresk, but she had no sooner done so, than she would fain have recalled her words, for her father was extremely angry. By an odd coincidence, at that very moment the servant entered the room and said, Mr Bitteresk desired to see the doctor. On hearing this, the wrathful parent hastened to the drawing-room, and rejecting the hand which was held out to him, expressed, with much warmth, his entire disapprobation of Mr Bitteresk's conduct.

'You are a male flirt, sir, and let me tell you, that is a character I despise.'

'A flirt, Dr Topgrass!' cried Mr Bitteresk. 'Heaven forbid that I should trifle with that which I most deeply venerate, and most earnestly covet—the love of woman.'

This reply, expressed as it was in tones almost tremulous in their earnestness, was wholly unexpected by the irate doctor, who, with some difficulty maintaining his tone of injury, asked: 'Is it not a fact, sir, that on the day you dined here you paid the most marked attention to my eldest daughter? Did you not address your conversation exclusively to her? and did you not entreat her not to withdraw her eyes from yours? Such

attentions, you will say, mean nothing. It is enough, that I do not permit them. But, not content with trying to undermine the peace of mind of my eldest daughter, you act in a most unaccountable manner towards my youngest. Is it not true that you stroked her hair? I ask you, sir, as an honourable man, can you offer any excuse for taking the unwarrantable liberty of feeling the point of her nose?'

'Yes, Dr Topgrass, I can,' replied Mr Bitteresk excitedly, taking a book from his pocket.

'Can you deny that you have stared at both of my daughters in a manner which, if your attentions were meaningless, as they must have been with regard to at least one of the sisters, was highly reprehensible; nay, is it not true, that even the sacred edifice for divine worship was the scene of your impertinence?' said Dr Topgrass, delighting in the accumulated guilt of his culprit.

'I admit the accusation. Hear, I implore, my defence,' said Mr Bitteresk. 'I am a disciple of Lavater, and study the science of physiognomy, and, while I confess that I have gazed long and anxiously at the lineaments of your daughters, I think, if you were aware how much of the character may be revealed in a single feature of the human face, you would admit that nothing short of continued contemplation of any particular countenance could suffice the student. Allow me, for your satisfaction, to mention a few of the mental characteristics to be discerned in the lips alone. Well defined, large, and proportionate lips, the middle line of which is equally serpentine on both sides, and easy to be drawn, though they may denote an inclination to pleasure, are never seen in a bad, mean, common, false, crouching, vicious countenance. A lipless mouth, resembling a single line, denotes coldness, industry, a love of order, precision, housewifery, and if it be drawn upwards at the two ends, affectation, pretension, vanity, and, which may ever be the production of cool vanity, malice. Calm lips, well closed without constraint, and well delineated, certainly betoken consideration, discretion, and firmness. A mild overhanging lip generally signifies goodness. There are innumerable good persons also with projecting under-lips.'

'Begad, if you had to find out all that, I don't wonder you had to stare at the girls,' interrupted the doctor.

'Not to weary you,' continued Mr Bitteresk, 'I pass now to the nose, which, in length, ought to equal the length of the forehead. The button end must be neither hard nor fleshy. It was to ascertain by the sense of touch the nature of that feature in your youngest daughter, that I begged her to allow me to touch the point of her nose. The quality of the hair is also important to the physiognomist, and Miss Maggie was kind enough to permit me to place my hand on her head when I desired to test her character by the texture of its covering. I am, as you are possibly not aware, in search of a wife, and I have decided to choose one, by this, I admit difficult, but, I am convinced, sure method. The conclusion at which I have arrived is, that the physiognomy of your youngest daughter is perfectly satisfactory, and I have come to-day to ask your permission to pay my addresses to her.'

'Mr Bitteresk, you are an honourable man. Forgive my unjust suspicion,' said Dr Topgrass, heartily shaking his visitor by the hand. 'I'll go

and send in Maggie, and I wish you success in your wooing.'

When Maggie entered, Mr Bitteresk took pains to shew her that he had not, in his conduct towards her, been actuated by any spirit of frivolity, and after explaining, as he had done, to her father his real purpose, he asked, somewhat formally, if he might be permitted to pay his addresses to her. Maggie's black eyes sparkled with fun as she said: 'No, Mr Bitteresk; you must lend me Lavater, and I must now study your physiognomy; and you mustn't consider it a breach of propriety if I ask to be allowed to feel the point of your nose.'

'Certainly not,' was the grave reply.

'Should I find your physiognomy perfectly satisfactory, I shall then be justified in granting you permission to pay your addresses; not till then.'

'Miss Maggie, the excellent sense you display in the present instance proves, to my great satisfaction, that I have not studied physiognomy in vain. The reply you have made me is precisely that which I should have expected from your countenance. How long shall I give you to read the volume? A week?'

'Oh, not so long as that!' replied Maggie. 'It isn't the book which is hard to read, I fancy, but the faces.'

'Unfortunate man that I am!' exclaimed Mr Bitteresk, with the air of having suddenly remembered something, 'I shall be the victim of my own system. I now rest on my merits, and by the laws of common-sense you are bound to reject me. Had I trusted to the kindness of one of the most amiable of her sex, then I might have gained the object of my desire. Give me back the book, Miss Maggie, and let me rest my claim on your compassion.'

While he thus spoke, the methodical, formal, Mr Bitteresk shewed himself a man of more depth of feeling than Maggie had supposed. It now, for the first time, occurred to her that he loved her.

'Oh, I must read the book, Mr Bitteresk,' she replied, opening it and reading aloud: 'Short, wrinkled, knotty, regular, and saw-cut foreheads with intersecting wrinkles, are incapable of true friendship.' Maggie, as if she thought it a good piece of fun, here raised her eyes to the forehead of her suitor, who stood before her with such an anxious expression of countenance, that she laughingly shut the book. 'Mr Bitteresk, do you know you are a comical individual, and I'm rather fond of comical people! Now go away, and come back the day after to-morrow. It is only fair that you should be judged according to your own system.'

'Permit me, before I leave, to make an apology to your elder sister,' begged Mr Bitteresk.

In compliance with this request, Maggie left the room, and sent in Adelaide, who presented herself before him she had imagined her admirer, in a decidedly shame-faced manner.

'Miss Topgrass,' began Mr Bitteresk, in a tone of much seriousness, 'it distresses me unspeakably to think, that while absorbed in scientific research, and, for the time, oblivious of every other consideration, I should have acted in such a manner as to mislead you. When, for the moment, I forget that I am a physiognomist, and remember only that I am a man, I see clearly that my conduct was calculated to deceive.'

'Well, Mr Bitteresk, who could have supposed that when you asked me not to withdraw my eyes from yours, you were only studying science!' said Adelaide, blushing. 'But let all that be forgotten, and if you are really attached to my sister, I will exert what influence I may have in your favour.'

'Do so, Miss Topgrass, and you will procure my lasting gratitude; but I very much fear that my physiognomy is not satisfactory, and that as your sister becomes acquainted with the science, she will learn to despise me.'

Mr Bitteresk then took leave; and as Adelaide watched from the window his retreating figure, she reflected that, though no Apollo, there was much to respect and admire in this odd being.

When Mr Bitteresk on the appointed day called upon Maggie, she met him with the book he had lent her in her hand, and after the usual greetings, she opened the conversation by saying: 'Lavater observes, Mr Bitteresk, that no one who is not well-informed can become a good physiognomist. Those painters were the best whose persons were the handsomest. Rubens, Van Dyck, and Raphael, possessing three gradations of beauty, possessed three gradations of the genius of painting. The physiognomists of the greatest symmetry are the best. As the most virtuous can best determine on virtue, and the just on justice, so can the most handsome countenances on the goodness, beauty, and noble traits of the human countenance, and consequently on its defects and noble properties.'

As Maggie concluded these sentences, she looked fixedly at her suitor, yet with a merry twinkle in her eye which he did not perceive.

'I understand you, Miss Maggie. I am not handsome enough, you would say, to pretend to the study of the science of which we speak.'

'Consequently, there is every probability that you have not read my face aright,' she replied, 'and that I am very far from being the kind of girl you suppose. As your suit was therefore made under a false impression, you are at liberty to withdraw it, and I advise you to go and fall in love with some woman in the ordinary way, for the old-fashioned foolish reason, that she is pretty, or engaging, or that you like her, you don't exactly know why.'

At these words, an expression of deep dejection clouded the face of Mr Bitteresk.

'There would, however, be no harm in my making a study of your features,' observed Maggie, 'if I were handsome enough to be a physiognomist, but it seems to me that some amount of vanity is necessary to induce one to become a student of this science. Assuming for the moment, however, that I am sufficiently good-looking, be kind enough, Mr Bitteresk, to turn slightly towards the window, so that I may study your face in profile.'

With an air of hopeless resignation, which struck Maggie as most ludicrous, Mr Bitteresk placed himself in the required position.

'It is difficult for me to decide,' she observed, 'whether duplicity or imagination predominates in your eyelashes; but with regard to the third wrinkle on your right temple, I do not hesitate to say that it denotes great simplicity of character, amounting even to guilelessness. As for the mole on the cheek that is turned towards me, I believe it to be indicative of directness of purpose, combined with an affectionate disposition; while the

fourth freckle on your nose betokens, I am convinced, humility. In short, Mr Bitteresk, I find your physiognomy tolerably satisfactory, and it is much to be regretted that you are quite at fault concerning me, as I think you would have made the best of husbands.'

Up to this moment, the esteem, verging, it may be, towards a warmer feeling, with which Maggie regarded her suitor, had been covered with a crust of raillery, and as she spoke the last words, she looked him fearlessly in the face. But as she did so, her self-command unaccountably forsook her. She had been too bold, she feared. What would he think? Ah! he would know the humiliating position in which she and her sister were placed, how anxious her father was that she should be married, and how few eligible men ever visited Oakhill. Thus reflecting, Maggie rose and walked to the window, to hide her heightened colour and air of confusion; but Mr Bitteresk advanced towards her, and took her hand. Glancing timidly round, Maggie perceived, to her surprise, a countenance so much altered by the expression of the moment, that it might almost have belonged to another individual. No trace of oddity or formality was now visible, but with an air of tenderest affection, he said quietly but earnestly: 'I think, Maggie, we love each other.'

For some days after this, the doctor's youngest daughter went about the house with an air of abstraction, and was frequently to be found gazing at the winding river, or at night, at the stars, or the moon. When addressed, she frequently answered in such a manner as to indicate that her mind was occupied with some subject of contemplation of an interest so absorbing as to render her to some extent oblivious of what passed around her. At a certain hour every day it was perceived that she became somewhat agitated, and the sisters remarked that Mr Bitteresk invariably called at that time. But it was only for a few weeks that Adelaide and Julia were able to remark the change wrought by the tender passion on their once fun-loving sister, for in little more than a month, Mr Bitteresk and she were married. As Maggie had expressed a wish to see foreign lands, her husband took her abroad for some months, and on their return to England, they spent a winter in London. Here they were visited by Adelaide and Julia successively. It was on the occasion of her visit to the metropolis, that the latter found her ideal, who, somewhat to Maggie's surprise, was a man who squinted with both eyes. On Mrs Bitteresk's happening to allude to this defect, however, Julia asked, with some energy of manner: 'Do you think me capable of being affected by anything so trivial as personal appearance? There is no true beauty, except that of the soul.'

'No doubt,' replied Maggie; 'but Lavater remarks that the squinting eye denotes a deceitful, crafty person, one who willingly avoids labour if he can, indulging in idleness, play, usury, and pilfering.'

'If Lavater says that, then it is plain he knows nothing of the subject on which he treats,' answered Julia with some warmth.

'Oh, I think, Julia, dear, your ideal is a worthy one,' replied Maggie, smiling. 'I only quoted Lavater to tease you a bit. I haven't much faith in him myself, though I feel grateful to him for helping me to a husband who is the best of men.'

Of the three sisters, Adelaide alone now lives with her father in Oakhill, and although report affirms that the doctor has made more than one attempt at matrimony, he has not yet found a lady sufficiently youthful who is willing to become his second spouse.

THE HOMES OF OTHER DAYS.*

No one has done more than Mr Thomas Wright to elucidate the manners and customs of England during the mediæval period. A series of papers originally contributed by him to the *Art Journal* was published, under the title of *The History of Domestic Manners and Sentiments*, in 1862. This work being out of print, has been revised and considerably enlarged, so that it forms an imposing volume of five hundred pages, under the title, *The Homes of other Days*. As the book was suggested by a perusal of Lord Lytton's *Harold*, it is appropriately dedicated to that nobleman.

The Anglo-Saxon *ham*, or home, consisted generally of a *heal*, or hall, with little rooms, or *burs* (afterwards bowers) on the outside, surrounded by an earthwork or wall, inclosing the house and a yard (*geard*). The remains of these Saxon homes are often mistaken for early camps. Here the Anglo-Saxon nobleman or gentleman kept a rude state, according to his means; and a very slight investigation into the manners of our forefathers, shew how much they needed the polish and refinement of their Norman conquerors. They had strength of mind and body—the latter predominating—but both obscured by sloth, engendered by habitual drunkenness. There can be no doubt that the Norman Conquest infused into our race the energy which is our national characteristic. If—as there is abundant reason to believe—many of the Saxon noblemen were like Athelstane of Coningsburgh, depicted by Sir Walter Scott in *Ivanhoe*, we cannot wonder at their incurring the ridicule and contempt of the more refined Normans. The English language survived because the unmarried among the conquerors selected wives among the beautiful Saxon maidens, and these would naturally teach their children their native tongue. The same thing had happened before when the Scandinavian adventurers who settled in Normandy married in that country.

The manners of the Anglo-Saxons previous to their conversion to Christianity are shewn in the romance of *Beowulf*—supposed to have been composed before they left the continent—and also in early graves. Drinking cups and buckets are frequently found: the former are made so that they will not stand upright, so that they must be emptied at a draught; and the latter were used to carry the ale or mead into the hall. The hall generally consisted of one apartment (the retainers using it at night as a sleeping-room), but sometimes it had an upper room, approached by a *stager*, or stair. The house and its belongings were nearly always of wood; the only Anglo-Saxon words for building are, in fact, *timbrian* and *atimbrian*, to make of timber. *Ham* was not the only term for the dwelling; as a residence, it

* *The Homes of other Days: a History of Domestic Manners and Sentiments in England*. By Thomas Wright, M.A., F.S.A. &c. London: Trübner & Co. 1871.

was called *hūs*; from its chief room, *heal*; or as an inclosure, *tūn* (origin of town).

A Saxon never dined in private—it was considered disgraceful to do so. Seated on the *heah-sēol*, or high seat, he dispensed a lavish hospitality, every one being welcome. The rude walls were often covered with hangings, sometimes richly ornamented, on which arms and trophies of the chase were hung. The fire was made in the middle of the apartment, the smoke finding its way out of an aperture in the roof. Wood was generally burned, though it is believed the Saxons were acquainted with the use of coal.

Breakfasting about nine o'clock, the Anglo-Saxon was ready for his dinner or principal repast at three, after which was the *æfen-mete*, or evening-meal, the time for partaking of which is uncertain. Mr Wright thinks the last-named meal was not originally in use among our Saxon forefathers. If the food was deficient in quality, it was made up in quantity. The great oak forests fed large droves of swine, and bacon was largely eaten. Boiling seems to have been the chief mode of cooking meat, which was eaten with a great deal of bread (so that a servant was called *hlaf-etan*, or loaf-eater) and vegetables. Many of our culinary terms are Saxon, such as kettle (*cytel*), cook (*cōc*), kitchen (*cykene*), and broth (*brod*). Wine (*win*, from Latin *vinum*) was used by the Saxons, though only on state occasions, a few only of the monasteries appearing to have had vineyards. While indulging in their potations, the Saxons had various persons to afford them amusement, such as the *hearpere*, or harper; *pipere*, or piper; *gligman*, or gleeman. Minstrels were always welcomed to the hall, and for this reason spies generally came in this disguise. They had also the game of *tæfel*, supposed to have been like backgammon, to beguile weary hours either in the hall or the bowers of the ladies. The beds in the latter were of the rudest description, and generally consisted merely of a bench with a sack filled with straw placed upon it, hence the words for this article were *bæne* (a bench) and *strow* (straw). People went to bed perfectly naked, and the bed-clothes consisted of a sheet (*scyte*) and a coverlet (*bed-felt*). It is surprising to find that hot baths were frequently used, derived probably from the Romans.

Marriage was treated as a civil institution among the Anglo-Saxons; it is not, therefore, surprising that when a couple disagreed after marriage, they could readily separate and marry again. Nevertheless, Mr Wright says, 'the Saxon woman in every class of society possessed those characteristics which are still considered to be the best traits of the character of Englishwomen; she was the attentive housewife, the tender companion, the comforter and consoler of her husband and family, the virtuous and noble matron.' It is a pity that ladies did not treat their servants better; there is little doubt that, as a rule, the fair sex used their slaves (for they were nothing else) very cruelly.

The people at this period were very fond of games and all out-of-door amusements. There is reason to believe that the amphitheatres of the Romans were used for like purposes by the Saxons. A representation of such a use occurs in an Anglo-Saxon manuscript of the Psalms in the Harleian Collection. In this instance the arena is occupied by minstrels and a tame bear. The nobles and gentlemen were passionately fond of hunting and hawking. In the former, they used dogs like our greyhounds,

and from representations in manuscripts, these were totally different from the British dogs shewn on pottery.

Chariots were used for travelling, and called *wægn* or *wæn* (hence waggon), but only by people of high rank. Though the word *inn* is Anglo-Saxon, meaning *lodging*, those in country districts were few and far between. Our author suggests that the ruins of Roman villas by the side of roads may have been roughly repaired for travellers carrying their own provisions, and that the term *ceald-hereberga*, or *cold harbour*, given to so many places in different parts of England, was applied to this species of accommodation. There was no lack, however, of hospitality in these times, and the deficiency of shelter for travellers was greatly compensated by the ever-open door of the hall.

For a considerable time, the entrance of the Normans had little effect upon the middle and lower classes of the people. The Anglo-Saxons seemed to take a pride in continuing unchanged their manners and customs, those of the Normans unpleasantly reminding them of their servile condition. The Normans were, of course, not content with the rude dwellings of the Saxons, and stone edifices began to rise in various parts. These were not general until the baronial castles were raised towards the end of the Conqueror's reign. Of ordinary stone mansions, Mr Wright is not aware of any remains now existing older than the reign of Henry II. In the private houses of the twelfth century, an upper room (*solar*) was usual. This had very small windows, as Samson, Abbot of Bury, nearly found to his cost in 1182. He was sleeping in the *solar* of a manor-house belonging to that abbey, and the house caught fire. The door of the upper room by which he had entered was locked, and, as he could not get through the small windows, he narrowly escaped death. The hall was still the chief part of the house, and in the principal houses the chamber adjoined it instead of being over it. The next improvement was to make the chamber of two stories, the whole house then containing, with the hall, three apartments. Chimneys, as we understand the term, were first introduced in the chamber.

William of Malmesbury is careful to impress upon us the general sobriety and gravity of the Normans. They lost this to a great extent under the Conqueror's son. 'Then was there flowing hair and extravagant dress; and then was invented the fashion of shoes with curved points; then the model for young men was to rival women in delicacy of person, to mince their gait, to walk with loose gesture, and half naked.' The Normans were particularly fond of good cooking, and first-rate cooks occupied a high position with them. This operation was often performed in the open air, in the courtyard of the house or castle, and the cooks appear to have handed the articles to the guests on the spits on which they were roasted. Bowl-shaped vessels succeeded the Saxon horns for drinking, and wine was coming more into use. Neckam must have been a connoisseur, for he says (writing in the twelfth century) the latter when drunk 'should descend impetuously like thunder, sweet-tasted as an almond, creeping like a squirrel, leaping like a roebuck, strong like the building of a Cistercian monastery, glittering like a spark of fire, subtle as the logic of the schools of Paris,

delicate as fine silk, and colder than crystal.' The ordinary classes had little else to eat besides bread, butter, cheese, and a few vegetables. The Normans appear to have broken their fast earlier than the Saxons, and took their principal meal or dinner at nine in the morning. Like their predecessors in England, they do not seem to have had much furniture in their houses, and to remedy this, stone benches were constructed in various parts of the rooms when the house was built.

Of course the continental system of feudal tenure by military service wrought a great change in England. By this system, the land-holders or fighting-men were alone free, other classes being little better than slaves. Mr Wright points out that the system was never established here so fully as on the continent, since the towns never entirely lost their independence. The aristocratic class took the greatest delight in plundering the mercantile portion of the community, whom they regarded as their legitimate prey. But the somewhat artificial gallantry of feudal manners in the intercourse of the sexes, certainly produced a refinement, the effects of which are felt to the present day. Some of the mediæval romances contain a great deal of worldly wisdom. An aged count, in the *Doom of Mayence*, thus counsels his son: 'Be liberal in gifts to all, for the more you give the more honour you will acquire, and the richer you will be; for a gentleman who is too sparing will lose all in the end, and die in wretchedness and disgrace; but give without promising wherever you can. Do not quarrel with your neighbour, and avoid disputing with him before other people; for if he know anything against you, he will let it out, and you will have the shame of it. Honour all the clergy, and speak fairly to them, but leave them as little of your goods as you can: the more they get from you, the more you will be laughed at; you will never profit by enriching them. And if you wish to save your honour undiminished, meddle with nothing you do not understand, and don't pretend to be a proficient in what you have never learned. And if you have a valet, take care not to seat him at the table by you or take him to bed with you; for the more honour you do to a low fellow the more will he despise you. If you should know anything that you would wish to conceal, tell it by no means to your wife, if you have one, for if you let her know it, you will repent of it the first time you displease her.'

Chess was very popular in the eleventh century. The pieces were made of the tusk of the walrus, and many of these have been found in the north of England. This substance was called whale's bone in the middle ages, and a variety of articles were made of it. Candles were in more general use than oil, however, to give light during the long winter evenings.

Saxons and Normans agreed in one thing—their devotion to the chase. The Norman aristocrats pursued this amusement utterly regardless of the harm they did to the crops of the Saxon tiller of the soil. Bows and arrows were used in hunting the stag. These were not introduced by the Normans, as the words bow (*boga*) and arrow (*arewe*) are both derived from the Saxon.

Schools at this period were often kept in churches. We must bear in mind that the middle classes got the best education, the aristocracy treating it with contempt. A gentleman's son was

placed in the household of some great man, where he learned manly exercises, and how to behave himself at table. In mediæval romances, if a person of rank is able to read, it is often mentioned as an unusual circumstance. At a later period, this extraordinary state of affairs was somewhat altered. But it generally happened that the feudal lady was more highly educated than the gentleman. Latin was the language usually taught, and some of the school-books consisted of directions of behaviour in good society, in that language. The code of good manners was called *urbanitas*, because it was supposed to belong more to the city (*urbs*) than the country. It was also called in Norman-French *curtoisie*. Books were read at table after dinner, and so also were the rolls of vellum containing popular narratives of English history. Many of these have been preserved, and Mr Wright has written a book upon them, printed at the expense of Mr Mayer of Liverpool.

The various dishes were carried into the hall with great ceremony, a steward, with his rod of office, heading the procession. As we have already stated, the roasts were carried in on the spits, and these were often of silver. In the romance of *Garin le Loherain*, a quarrel is represented as taking place at dinner, when one of the guests, wanting a weapon, snatched a spit from the hands of an attendant. The fourteenth century Flemish brass of Robert Braunch, at St Margaret's, Lynn, shews, at a feast given by Edward III. by the corporation of that town, the peacock being carried in with attendant minstrels, &c. The hour of dinner at this period was ten o'clock in the forenoon, and five for the afternoon meal. Each guest washed his hands before sitting down, and when he rose from the table. As forks were almost unknown, this was a very necessary operation. The guests were placed in couples, these eating the same food, and having one plate between them. Care was taken to place those together who were likely to be friendly. This was the origin of the phrase 'to eat in the same dish' (*manger dans la même écuelle*), implying friendship. But plates do not appear to have been generally in use. Mr Wright observes that loaves were cut into thick slices (called in French *tranchoirs*; English, *trenchers*, because they were to be carved upon), and in these the portions of meat were placed, the gravy passing into the bread. Sometimes this was eaten by the guest, but, if not, it went away with the leavings, which were destined for the poor.* In great houses, a platter (often of silver) was placed under the trencher, and so, after a time, the use of the latter was abandoned. Minstrels played, and mountebanks performed their antics, both during and after dinner. The minstrels or jongleurs were always welcome, and delighted knights and ladies by chanting love-songs or deeds of chivalry. We should mention that the *dresser* or *dressoir* was the most important piece of furniture in the hall from the thirteenth century. Upon this were arranged the most valuable articles of plate possessed by the master of the house; and the number of shelves in the dresser was regulated according to the rank of the possessor.

All classes were fond of gambling, and generally

* Martial de Paris, writing of the episcopal tables of that time (fifteenth century), says: 'Alas! what have the poor! They have only the *tranchoirs* of bread which remain on the table.'

used dice for the purpose. These were used either in the simplest form—namely, that of throwing the dice, or that operation was combined with other games. In the former form it found favour in low taverns, where people played for their clothes when they had lost all their money. The medieval game of tables was like our backgammon. In illuminated manuscripts, round discs like draughtsmen and the three dice, for that was the usual number, are clearly shewn. The game of *dames*, also played in the middle ages, was probably *draughts*. Playing-cards were introduced late in the fourteenth century, and became very popular in the fifteenth; Margery Paston, writing to her husband, December 24, 1483, says: 'Please it you to weet' [know] 'that I sent your eldest son, John, to my Lady Morley, to have knowledge of what sports were used in her house in the Christmas next following after the decease of my lord her husband; and she said that there were none disguisings, nor harpings, nor luting, nor singing, nor none loud disports, but playing at the tables, and the chess, and *cards*.' After supper a number of merry games were played, such as *bric*, *qui fery*? (who struck?), and *tiers* or *hoodman-blind*. Games of chance were very popular, such as *Ragman*, in which players, in turn, drew a character at hazard. The characters were written in verse, on a long roll, and to each verse a string was attached, and each person choosing a character selected a string, which came out at the end of the roll when it was rolled up. Mr Wright, in his *Anecdota Literaria*, prints a set of these verses of the thirteenth century. Old and young played at ball, whipping-top, and *kayles*, or *ninepins*.

Of course, in the fourteenth century, houses had greatly increased in size and conveniences. Among the chambers added was a parlour (*parloir*), or talking-room, derived from the monastic houses. The *chamber* was made more spacious, often richly furnished, and always had its fireplace and chimney. In this room, dinner and supper were sometimes served in private, though it was considered more popular to take meals in the hall. At the foot of the bed in the chamber, was the hutch (*huche*), containing plate, money, and other valuables. A treasure-chest was also called a coffer. Larger amounts of money were frequently buried underground. When a town was sacked, the victors rushed into the chambers to burst open the chests. Placed at the foot of the bed, these hutches formed a very convenient seat, and persons are often represented sitting upon them in illuminated manuscripts.

Cock-fighting and bear and bull baiting were very popular in the towns. No butcher was allowed to kill a bull until it had been baited. These amusements were actually witnessed by ladies. It is on record, that as late as the sixteenth century, Mary and Elizabeth, daughters of Henry VIII., 'assisted' at such a scene. The upper classes were passionately fond of hawking, and illuminated manuscripts have frequent illustrations of the sport. It was considered especially appropriate for ladies. They chiefly hawked by rivers for herons and waterfowl, and from this, hawking was frequently called going to the river (*aller en rivière*). Blackbirds, jays, and thrushes were also hawked, and the lady was recommended to carry a bow and arrow, so that, if the bird took shelter in a tree from the hawk, she might shoot it.

Horses were much more numerous in the fourteenth century, and travelling was generally accomplished on horseback. Men rode in companies, attended by followers, who too often amused themselves by annoying the peasantry. This practice the author of a satirical song (*temp.* Edward I.) probably had in his mind when he wrote at an earlier period:

Whil God wes on erthe,
And wondrede wyde,
Whet wes the resonn
Why he nolde ryde?
For he nolde no groom
To go by hys syde,
Ne gruechyng* of no gedelyng,†
To chaule ne to chydre.

Ladies and effeminate persons rode in carriages called *chars*. One of these is represented in the *Luttrell Psalter* (fourteenth century), and seems to be a very cumbersome affair. The use of carriages seems to have been very exceptional. Horses were much prized, particularly those of Arabian breed; but those procured from Turkey and Greece were much valued. The following are the names of the horses in common use in the middle ages: the *palefroi*, or palfrey; the *dextrier*, or war-horse; the *roncin*, for servants; and the *sommier*, for carrying the luggage. A horse called the *haquenée*, or hackney, was used by ladies. Almost all the valuable horses used in England were imported from the continent. Six pounds was considered a high price for a horse at that time. White horses were most prized, then dapple-gray, and bay or chestnut.

The increase in the number of travellers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, made a demand for inn accommodation. The smaller of these houses were indicated simply by a stake with a garland, or a broom hung over the door. A bush used for the same purpose was the origin of the proverb, 'Good wine needs no bush.' Travelling was not pleasant for those who had to go on foot, for they had to carry provisions with them, and the roads were infested with robbers and banditti. And not only so; knights and others built castles near difficult passes or fords, and levied a toll on the passers-by. If he could not or would not pay, the luckless traveller was liable to be thrown into a dungeon. Though inns were more numerous, they were still insufficient in number, though this want was to a great extent remedied by private hospitality. The stranger generally brought news, which was very welcome in an out-of-the-way country-house. To such an extent was medieval hospitality carried, that it is said 'that Fulke Fitz-Warine turned the king's highway through the middle of the hall of his manor of Alleston, in order that no traveller might have an excuse for passing by without partaking of his liberality.' It seems that a stranger might remain two or three days without question, after that time he was expected to give more account of himself.

Education was thought more of in the fourteenth century than at a former period. Grammar-schools had been founded by the mercantile classes in the towns, and these were often of considerable excellence. There was a great thirst for learning among the middle classes, chiefly because it was the only way in which they could rise to high distinction.

* Discontent.

† Gadling.

At the close of the fourteenth century, the advance made by the middle classes was very great, though this was checked by the Wars of the Roses in the fifteenth century. Houses had vastly improved. Instead of the hall and one or two chambers, we find whole suites of the latter, and people deserted the hall to a great extent, to take their meals in private. The rooms were built round a court, the windows looking into it. Although there was a growing tendency for the lord and lady to take their meals in another apartment, dinner and supper for the whole household were always served in the hall. The head table was always permanent, but generally the other tables were made for each meal by placing boards upon trestles. The benches and backs of the seats were furnished with cushions and ornamented cloths. The salt-cellar was a very important article: it was directed to be placed first on the table, and it was considered very unlucky if any of its contents were spilled during the meal. Guests generally brought their own knives. The floor was usually paved with tiles and strewn with rushes. The parlour was often on the ground-floor, and was generally the most comfortable room in the house. This room was frequently hung with tapestry, or decorated with wall-paintings. Branches of latten (brass) were often placed in this apartment, and great attention seems to have been paid in the fifteenth century to artificial light. In the sixteenth century, dinner was generally served in the parlour at noon. Mr Wright quotes the following from a treatise on the 'most vyle and detestable use of dyce play,' composed about the beginning of that century. A person says: 'So down we came again' (from the chambers) 'into the parlour, and found there divers gentlemen, all strangers to me, and what should I say more but to dinner we went.' The dresser or buffet for the exhibition of the plate was moved from the hall into the parlour, and elaborately ornamented doors were frequently added. Space will not permit us to follow Mr Wright more fully in his interesting work. We may mention that it is profusely illustrated with woodcuts, chiefly taken from illuminated manuscripts.

A WOMAN'S VENGEANCE.

CHAPTER III.—'WHAT IS MY THOUGHT LIKE?'

'WHY, Mr Adair, I thought you were never late!' pouted Helen, from the window. 'I have learned your virtues from Arthur, but I fear I shall have to learn your imperfections from yourself.'

It was not a graceful speech, though the fair speaker did not mean it ungracefully. She was a little annoyed, as some young ladies are apt to be in such cases, with her lover's constant praises of his old friend: she had been aware that his opinion of her had been asked of him by Arthur, and though, of course, it had been a favourable one (as how could it have been otherwise, since the engagement had been already effected?), she resented the fact; and she objected to be kept waiting by anybody.

'My dear young lady,' said Jack Adair, holding up a fish-basket and displaying its contents, 'these lobsters are my excuse, and, as you see, they blush for me. I was here at six o'clock, but went back

for them to the faithless fishmonger's, who had promised them at that hour. The house was closed; and call me no recreant knight, since, for your sweet sake, I have broken, not a lance, indeed, but his chamber window.'

'Adair is always right, Miss Somers, have you not learned that yet?' said Allardyce in a low voice, and with a smile that might be good-natured or not, as she chose to take it.

'Hollo!' said Tyndall, leaping lightly into the barge, 'so the real recreants have turned up at last. I suppose they have introduced themselves; but if not, this is the Honourable Wynn Allardyce, commonly called "Lardy;" and this, Mr Paul Jones, of some unpronounceable place in Wales, commonly called the "Pirate," from his noted namesake, after whose example he has harried most of the watering-places of England, though without carrying off a prize. Jack, you know.'

Jack, whom they knew, was a fine young fellow of five or six and twenty, with curling brown hair, and a complexion as well tanned as English suns could effect. He had a pleasant smile, that was not meant for show, but as natural to him as scent to flowers, and a cheery voice, that in a small room faded persons with nerves had been known to consider a trifle loud, but which, in the present circumstances of open windows and river-air, was just as it should be. Throughout the voyage, none had ever need to say 'What?' when Jack addressed them, notwithstanding the ripple of the wave against the prow, or the wash made in the weeds behind the stern; and when he laughed, as he did now at Tyndall's comical introduction, Echo laughed too, from under Folly Bridge, and sniggered behind the distant walls of Magdalen.

'Are you all ready?' inquired Tyndall.

'Shall I lower the flag and start the horse?' inquired Mr Jones.

'Oh, pray don't lower the flag,' said Helen piteously; 'I think it looks so bright and pretty.'

At this the men all laughed.

'My dear Helen,' said Arthur, 'you must know that Paul is nothing if he is not a sporting character; his metaphor is drawn from the race-course, where they lower the flag in sign of starting.'

'O dear,' exclaimed Mrs Somers, to whom this explanation was insufficient; 'don't let us have any racing, pray.—O lor, we're over! Save us, Mr Tyndall—save my daughter!'

This passionate appeal was caused by the first movement of the barge; as the horse felt the spur, the rope tightened, and the keel of the *Lotus* clove the yielding wave.

'Don't be frightened, Mrs Somers; we are just off, that's all,' said Adair good-naturedly.

'Just off, indeed!' returned she indignantly; 'I was just off the seat myself.—Ellen, my dear, this is shocking! The water is coming in, for I hear it; you have more influence with Arthur than I have, and you must insist on our being put on shore at once.'

Poor Adair, having less power over his risible faculties than the other gentlemen, had retired precipitately to shriek and roar above the cabin roof, and he was not unheard.

'I call that man a demon,' continued the exasperated old lady. 'I believe he would laugh if we were all drowned.'

'My dear mamma, there is no danger,' explained Helen. 'Do you suppose Arthur would let us run

the slightest risk? The motion is very pleasant now, surely.'

'You may think so, my dear. I daresay you would like riding on a camel, if Arthur was on the other hump; but I don't pretend to do so. I feel like blanc-mange, or a swan that's running on dry land—all of a wabble.'

Mrs Somers didn't look like a swan: with one hand she had grasped Mr Paul Jones, who happened to be near her, by the coat-collar, and with the other she held on to the leg of the table. 'Do, pray, let Mr Jones go, mamma,' remonstrated Helen in a whisper. 'There is no occasion to take hold of anything.'

'I mean to do it, however,' answered the old lady resolutely; 'if he's a pirate, he can swim; and as to the table, that'll float of itself when the thing goes over.'

It took all the ship's company, inclusive of Arthur's own man-servant, to calm the good lady's fears; and even when they succeeded, she was subject to relapses. Once she announced that the vessel had sprung a leak—on the evidence of a tear or two distilled from the great crystal iceberg which lay in one of the hampers in readiness for cup-time; and upon the first occasion of the tow-rope breaking, she went into hysterics. Eventually, however, she learned to enjoy the voyage like other folk; and when the rope was spliced for the fourteenth time, and Jack Adair made his celebrated joke about 'eight knots an hour' being good sailing, she appreciated it as much as anybody, and called him a sad wag. Except for the rope breaking, and even that was remedied at Abingdon by the purchase of a stronger one, there was no hitch in any of the arrangements. 'Youth at the stern, and Pleasure at the prow,' might have been taken for the motto of the *Lotus*. Past hall and hamlet, village church and ruined abbey, she glided on twist meadows full of sheep and kine; underneath walls of woodland, through which the sunlight fell green and golden on her deck; deep down in cool dark locks, where glees were sung; past farms, that seemed the very homes of peace, where dappled cows stood knee-deep in the stream, and switched their tails, and stared, and chewed the cud; past villas with broad lawns, where beaux and belles suspended croquet while the gay ship passed; neath bridges, where the yeoman stopped his gig, the hind his team, to see her shoot the arch; past garden islets, with fair fishing temples, in which Love was worshipped by fond pairs, whose shallop, fastened to the willow, swayed and swayed as though impatient of its freight's delay; past island tongues, overrun by weed and tangle, their king the king-fisher, their queen the stately swan, whose nest, hidden by a belt of reeds, lay in the alders, where Love was worshipped too.

The *Lotus*, since the horse was changed at intervals, went fast—so fast, that in mid-stream, and where the current was strong, she seemed, to those who watched her from the shore, to glance by like the dragon-flies (and scarce less bright and gay) which flitted on the reeds beneath the bank; and only at the locks, and when the horse's rider cried out 'Ferry!'—not the mere word, but a long plaintive prolongation of it, which the echoing woods took up (as though they wished her gone, and helped her on her way, that they might have their looking-glass, the river, to themselves again)—was there need to tarry until the ferryman poled his great

boat across, and her voyage could be resumed upon the other bank. And thus it happened that all the river-life that was to be seen that day, the *Lotus* saw. The eight-oared galleys and the racing-skiff passed it at full swing, the oars with molten silver on their blades, and music in their even sweep; but ever and anon the *Lotus* came on them again, their panting crews resting beneath some full-foliaged bank, or passing the gleaming pewter from lip to lip, at some river-side inn. As for the other craft, she passed them all, or rather they scattered at her approach (to give her room), like a swarm of gleaming fishes when the pike shews his peaked jaw: the painted wherry, wherein Paterfamilias plies the long-disused oar, and smiles upon his giggling girls; the steadfast punt, wherein the patient angler sits and casts the whirling line; the river-yacht, that shoots from bank to bank, and at the moment when it seems to touch the shore, sheers off, and with her side kissing the stream, woos once more with her sail the favouring breeze; or pleasanter to view even than these, the little row-boats, whose scanty crews are weary of the oar, and have rigged out a sail—a jacket, or a bathing-towel, or a shawl, perchance, borrowed from some fair passenger—and slowly drift, now here, now there, as the wind puffs, their inmates scarce awake enough to steer. Sweet is pleasure after toil, but sweeter leisure; and, lying at full length, or propped on one another's knees, these idlers neither found, nor sought, a haven.

Among so much that was picturesque, it was difficult to decide what earned the palm, but Helen gave it to a snow-white swan, whose neck stiffened in angry scorn as the barge swept by her, curved down to seek beneath her wing for her frightened cygnets, who presently, as though assured of their safety and her maternal care, crept beak by beak out of their floating cradle, and launched themselves once more upon the scarce less native bosom of the stream. Mrs Somers gave her note of preference in favour of a picnic party, who had landed on a flowery meadow to partake of their mid-day meal. It was a bachelor crew, and they had brought a tent with them, which made them independent of the inns at night—the beds of which, said Adair, who knew the river, 'were mostly stuffed with mangold-wurzel.' They had lit a pipsy-fire for cooking purposes, and one who had charge of the commissariat was reading aloud to his lieutenant a list of articles which would be required for dinner: 'Forks, spoons, and salad-bowl, oil, ice, and nutmeg grater.'

What struck the men's fancy most was their very narrow escape from a 'running-down case.' Ahead of the speedy *Lotus* was a sailing-boat that would not get out of the way. In vain were all cries of warning, from the shrill shrieks of the two ladies to the deep bass objurgations of the steersman. They came down upon her so closely that they could read *Laissez Aller* painted on her stern, and hear the canvas flap against her mast.

'She must be a derelict!' exclaimed Arthur.

'Then stop the boat!' cried Mrs Somers in an agony, and under the impression that a derelict was synonymous with a torpedo.

'There's nobody in her, madam,' explained Jack Adair.

But as the barge swept past, shaving off the other's rudder, there were disclosed, sitting in the

bottom of the boat, and under the shadow of the neglected sail, two very young gentlemen, with pipes in their mouths and cards in their hands, playing *écarté*. 'I propose,' said one; 'but, by Jove, we're over!' 'No, we are not,' said the other, replacing his hat, which the shock had knocked off his head. 'It's only the rudder gone. Play—I mark the king.' Such were the scenes of humour, such the sights of beauty, that met their eyes upon 'the silent highway.'

It has occurred to most persons given to metaphor to compare a river to human life; but the comparison had a special application in the present case to one at least of the passengers of the *Lotus*.

'By Jove!' said Arthur musingly, 'how jolly the old river looks: all ripple and sunshine here, with its rich meadows and gleaming woods; and only to think that after a few miles it becomes dull, and brackish, and beastly!'

'When the vessels that it carries,' continued Helen, taking up her lover's parable, and pleased to find herself a moralist, 'are no more pleasure-skiffs, but ships of heavy burden.'

'That's like one's Oxford life, and what it ends in,' sighed Tyndall.

'O Arthur!' remonstrated his betrothed, 'that is but a poor compliment to me.'

Arthur blushed, and stammered out some commonplace about having arrived in harbour, which was the end and object of man's voyage; but Adair struck in with a more meet apology.

'Indeed, Miss Somers, I think Arthur has said well; for the pleasure-skiff business cannot last for ever, and if it did, would pall upon us very much. It is in work of some sort that man finds his true happiness, and all our life-work is, so to speak, below bridge! Of course a man regrets his youth—the upper reaches of the river; but it is better for him when he gets into the broad navigable stream, far from the tempting back-waters that lure one to be idle, not to mention the perils of weirs and lashers.'

'Was Arthur in danger from the weirs and lashers, when you were at college together?' inquired Helen, with a forced smile. 'He looks very guilty about something.'

'I? Not a bit,' cried her lover, arousing himself, perhaps but from some pleasant dream of the past, but then, in the presence of the beloved object, we should be always wide awake, or only dream of the future. 'I was a very good boy at college, and always went straight; or if I did not, blame Jack, for it was he who steered me.—What are Allardyce and Jones about, I wonder?'

Those two gentlemen had found the atmosphere of the cabin a little oppressive—not that it was hot, but because *ladies' society* had always, after a time, the effect of carbonic acid gas upon them, and they had exchanged it for the ozone of their own bachelor talk, which they were enjoying above the roof. The fact is (as generally happens on board ship, whether it be a pleasure-barge or a Cunard liner), the company, notwithstanding the varied attractions of the river, were getting a little tired of it and of one another, and had already broken into groups. It is not everybody—and indeed, between ourselves, it is only a very few people who care for natural scenery, though a great many pretend to care for it. To do the Honourable Wynn Allardyce and Paul Jones, Esquire, justice,

they were not at all hypocrites in this respect, as we may learn from their private conversation.

'This is cursed dull!' observed the former, puffing at a gigantic cigar (with the lighted end of which he occasionally amused himself with raising blisters on the painted roof on which he leaned), and regarding nature generally with a depreciatory air—'dull as ditch-water.'

'Infernally!' assented Mr Jones. 'What a nice game at loo one could have inside, if it wasn't for the women.'

'You mean, what a nice game *three* could have,' said the other significantly, 'were the other charmers away.'

'Charmers!' echoed Mr Jones contemptuously.

'Adair is a real charmer, ain't he? Ugh!'

'Hush! Never mention names. Besides, I was alluding rather to the ladies. What do you think of the ladies, Paul?'

'I think the young un has a devil of a temper.'

'Why so?'

'Because she pitches into Adair, though he is so civil to her, and looks queer even at her lovey-dovey when he ain't all smiles and attention. How any man *can* be such a fool as to want to marry such a virago, is incredible to me!'

Allardyce smiled coldly. 'Vainly is the snare set in the eyes of such a bird as my pretty Poll; but all folks are not so wise. If A. T. were not a fool in this respect, he might not be in another also, which would be a dead loss to you and me. It is the married men—if you notice—that are always our best customers. Weak with women, weak in every way, ought to be a proverb.'

'That is ungrateful of you, since the sex are known to be very sweet upon you, Allardyce.'

'That's quite another matter, Paul. Moreover, I owe them no gratitude, for it is not I whom they adore, but my title—such as it is. If my brother were to die, I should be a viscount, and then they would adore me twice as much. A title is to women what the herb valerian is to cats. They would roll themselves in titles if they could, and scent their pocket-handkerchief with them. Why, if you were a viscount, my good fellow—to take an extreme case—they would adore you.'

'They shouldn't marry me, though,' said Mr Jones resolutely. 'If this girl here, for instance, was to go on her bended knees, and implore me, with outstretched hands—'

'And twenty thousand pounds in each of them?' interposed Allardyce.

'Well, I wouldn't marry her even then.'

'But, supposing that you owed a devil of a lot of money, and didn't see your way to paying it, except by looking through a wedding-ring? Supposing you owed just three thousand, for instance?—a debt of honour, Paul, such as it would distress you not to get paid, I'm sure.'

'You are right there,' said Mr Paul Jones grimly; 'it would very much distress me.'

'Well, then, put yourself in this excellent young man's place, and be charitable to him: how do we know that he really cares a brass farthing for this young woman, who has given herself such airs to my pretty Poll, and stroked his feathers so very much the wrong way, that he calls her a virago?'

'My dear fellow, I have no personal objection to the young lady whatever, upon my sacred honour; I only deplore—'

'Just so,' interrupted Allardyce coolly; 'you

only deplore her conduct. You invited yourself upon this charming expedition, and yet are surprised to find yourself *de trop*. If you were to propose to accompany these two young people on their honeymoon (which you are quite capable of doing), could you blame the bride for shewing that she didn't want you?"

"But she don't want *you*, neither," argued Mr Paul Jones vehemently; "and yet she is civil enough to you. So is the old woman—a regular stiff un, if there ever was one—she cottons to you as though you were her Methodist parson."

"I tell you, my poor Paul, that I am the herb valerian, at which the cat will jump wherever you hang it; whereas, you are, at the best, but a dandelion. Of course, it is very rude of these women to make the difference so marked; but it is just like women to do so. In the case of the girl, especially, I don't wonder at your feeling galled. If our cases were reversed, I think I should be inclined to say to myself: "You shall pay for this, young woman; or, rather, your husband that is to be shall pay for you."

"So he shall," muttered Mr Paul Jones: "that's well thought of."

"I mean to say, my dear fellow," continued the other mildly, "that the next time it comes to be a question of taking one handful or two, that, if I were in your case, I should not be so easily satisfied, so quixotically moderate, that's all."

"I've been much too good to him," said Mr Jones regretfully, "I know; but I thought that it was the safer plan, and that we should gain more by it in the long run. But now, I'm cursed if every insolent look of his pretty doll sha'n't cost him a hundred pounds."

"It'll be an expensive voyage to him at that rate, unless she improves in her manners, my dear fellow. I heard her ask Adair where on earth Tyndall picked you up."

"She did, did she?" returned the other slowly. "I'll pick *him* up for that. We shall have a little game to-night, I daresay; and even if his dear Jack should keep his hawk's eye on us — Hush! I heard our names mentioned."

It was just at that moment that Arthur, in the cabin, had exclaimed: "I wonder what Allardyce and Jones are about?"

"I know what they're *thinking* about," said Adair in a low voice, intended only for his friend's ear, but Helen heard him.

"What are they thinking about, Mr Adair?" She was annoyed with him for having defended Arthur against herself, and if she did not raise her voice with the positive intent of making mischief, she took no pains to moderate it. Messrs Jones and Allardyce popped their heads into the cabin in an instant.

"Did any one call us?" inquired Mr Jones innocently. "The view of this mill-race is so entrancing, Miss Somers, that Allardyce and I were just wishing that you could be persuaded to bring out your sketch-book."

"Was that what they were thinking about, Mr Adair?" reiterated Helen. "No; it wasn't.—Do you mind his telling us what it really was, Mr Allardyce?"

"I! certainly not," returned Allardyce indifferently. "Do you, Paul?"

"Well, that depends on what he says," answered Mr Jones uncomfortably.

"Well, that's the best thing he's said yet!" cried Mrs Somers, clapping her hands, and laughing loudly.—"O do, let's hear it, Mr Adair! There's nothing I dote on like conjuring tricks. When a party is getting a little dull, it is the very best thing for stirring one up a bit.—I remember a clever toy as your cousin George made, Ellen—he as was afterwards the civil-engineer, and run over in the tunnel—which, when you pulled a string, a sharp needle ran into your thumb quite unexpectedly, and made him a great favourite at evening parties.—But can you really do it, Mr Adair?"

"I can't run a needle into your thumb, but I can prick all your consciences, Mrs Somers. See! here are five pieces of paper. It is now nearly one o'clock—a time very favourable for a horoscope—I will write down what everybody in this company has been thinking about within these last ten minutes."

"Lor, Mr Adair, you make my flesh creep."

"But supposing I am correct—which, I honestly tell you, I am sure to be—I exact one condition. You must own that I *am* correct, and the subject of your thoughts must remain a dead secret between each of you and myself. Is that agreed upon?"

"It's all rubbish!" said Mr Paul Jones. "What does it signify whether we agree or not?"

"It may be rubbish," replied Adair coolly; "yet I can afford to bet you five hundred pounds that I will succeed with you."

"You bet me five hundred pounds?" The little man had already pulled out a pocket-book and a metallic pencil, and looked all eyes.

"Yes, I will," said Adair, who had come quickly round, so as to place himself between Jones and Allardyce; "only, I must not run all the risk, and you none. I have the utmost confidence in your word of honour, Mr Paul Jones, but still it would be so easy to say: "You are wrong," you see, when I was right. I must therefore get Mr Allardyce and yourself to put down, without collusion—upon paper—the subject of your private conversation during the last ten minutes (which you know I cannot have overheard). These notes shall be placed in any third person's hands—say Tyndall's, for instance—and opened only if necessary; that is, if the correctness of my magic be disputed. Come; do you bet or not?"

"No; I won't bet," said Jones doggedly, and after vainly endeavouring to exchange a glance with his friend. "It's all tomfoolery."

"I thought you wouldn't," said Adair coolly. "I will shew you the trick, however, without the money. See here. There are five pieces of paper, on each of which is written the most important topic that has occupied each of your minds during the ten minutes before this matter was broached. I throw the five paper packets down upon the cabin-table, and perform my miracle upon the tacit understanding that nobody will meddle with them unless under the conditions I shall name."

"That is but fair," said Helen, "though I don't believe in you a bit."

"Very good: if your faith is taxed, your patience shall not be so. All is ready; but only one at a time, if you please."

"Now, mamma, open yours first, and tell us whether Mr Adair has read your thoughts aright."

"Yes, indeed, he has, my dear!" exclaimed the old lady excitedly. "It's a most remarkable thing,

I'm sure; for I never mentioned it to a soul.—Why, you're a perfect conjurer, Mr Adair. Where did you learn to do it?' "

'I was taught it at Cairo, my dear madam, by an Egyptian wizard; and I have never known the thing to fail. But with every experiment the details are a little different. For instance, it will now be necessary for the person whose thought has been guessed to mention it aloud.'

The effect of this announcement was remarkable.

'But it might have been a very private thought,' urged Helen; 'one which one would not like to have made known to everybody.' The fact was she had been speculating in her own mind about those 'weirs and lashers'—the temptations and dissipations into which it was more than possible her beloved Arthur might have been led at Oxford, and that was not a subject for the public ear.

'I told you I should prick your consciences,' said Adair, smiling. 'Those who object to the ordeal have only to tear up their pellets without looking into them.'

'I tear up mine,' said Allardyce, suiting the action to the word, 'not because I have the least faith in the sorcery, but lest something might be written in it which it would be more embarrassing for others to hear than for the reader to repeat.'

'I am sure,' said Tyndall, 'that Jack is incapable of setting down on paper'—

'Pray, don't defend me, Arthur,' broke in Adair; 'Allardyce best knows what he was thinking about, and if I was not right, there would have been no occasion for him to read it.'

'By Jove! that's true,' said Tyndall. 'I think he had you there, my honourable friend.'

'Come, Arthur, we have not heard your thought,' interposed Helen, with a gaiety that women can so easily assume when quarrels threaten.

'Nay, nay,' whispered he; 'since you have declared off, by reason of the tender character of your meditations, you must credit me with similar sweet thoughts.' He also tore up his paper. Perhaps Arthur Tyndall, like Allardyce, had his fear, though of a different kind. At all events, he had good reason to know that his friend Jack might have hit upon his recent thoughts without any aid from the Egyptian wizard, and he did not wish that worthy's reputation to be enhanced at his expense.

'I don't believe you,' said Helen, pouting (for the weirs and lashers were still upon her mind). 'If you were thinking of me, you know, you might tell it to me; that is, just whisper it.'

'But we promised Adair, you know, to say it aloud, or not to tell it at all. Did we not, Jack?'

But Jack's voice was raised even louder than usual, and his attention engaged elsewhere. Something very like an altercation appeared to have sprung up between him and Mr Paul Jones. 'You have read the paper, sir,' exclaimed Adair with energy.

'So help me — I mean, I haven't, upon my soul!' returned the other earnestly. 'I only took it up; and there it is, you see, torn into little bits.'

'The word of a gentleman is always sufficient without an oath, Mr Jones. Of course, I believe you; and indeed, if you had broken our agreement, it would have mattered little, for, in such a case, the paper would have only shewn you some commonplace word without any meaning attached to

it, or else a blank. That is the way the Egyptian always confounds slippery folks.'

With a forced laugh and a red face, Mr Paul Jones lounged out of the cabin, and joined his friend Allardyce, who was standing in the bow of the boat.

'Upon my life, Adair,' said Tyndall, taking up the position the others had vacated above the roof, and beckoning to his friend to join him, 'you have made a very unpleasant quarter of an hour for us.'

'I couldn't help it, my dear fellow. I couldn't tell Miss Somers what those men were really thinking about, in fairness to themselves, and you surely would not have had me tell a lie. It was a plant of some sort they were plotting, I'll lay my life.'

'No friends of mine are given to "plants," Adair,' answered Tyndall coldly. 'You allow your prejudices to take too great liberties with men's characters.'

'Well, at all events, the little beggar didn't venture to take my bet; and I believe, if I had written "cards," I should have won it.'

'Well, and what did you write?'

'Oh, that is a secret between myself, the Egyptian, and one other.'

'Oh, come, the Egyptian may have put you up to a wrinkle or two in the way of fortune-telling and card-sharpping, in return for your saving his boy from the bastinado, but you must not expect me to believe in his magical powers, though you did take in that excellent old lady.'

'It seems to me that, like all the rest, you fought rather shy of testing them, however,' said Adair slyly.

'Well, Jack, the fact is, that throughout this blessed voyage I've been thinking of poor Jenny. What a fool I was, by-the-bye, to come by the river, where everything, of course, reminds me of her; and when you talked of Oxford days, my mind played truant altogether.'

'It should not have done that,' said Adair gravely; 'neither should you have supposed that, for the sake of a stupid jest, I should have played with the feelings of my friend.'

'You are right there, old fellow. That was a bad compliment to you, I allow,' said Tyndall, laying his hand on the other's arm. 'But my conscience was pricked a little, I suppose, and when that happens, one loses one's judgment, and grows suspicious of everybody.'

'I wish you would let your suspicions light on those who are deserving of them,' said Adair significantly. 'What sort of a fellow do you think he must be who violates a tacit agreement, and when taxed with it, is ready to take his oath to a lie?'

'Well, he would be no sweetmeat, certainly.'

'In other words, my dear Tyndall, he would be a scoundrel, and yet that is just what Mr Paul Jones has done. He is the "one other" that shares the secret. I saw him take up the packet, and substitute another one in its place, which he tore up with scrupulous honesty. The original paper he has got in his pocket.'

'I hope what is written on it is not insulting,' said Tyndall earnestly. 'I have my reasons for not making an enemy of that man.'

'I am sorry for that, because, unless I am much mistaken, he is a ready-made one, Arthur,' said the other drily. 'But there is nothing on the paper to hurt his feelings, except, to be sure, I told

him that the Egyptian confounded scoundrels by substituting a commonplace word for their secret thought, so that he will feel himself convicted of being a rascal.

'But what *was* the word, Jack ?

'Well, it was the same that was written on all the papers. I knew that it was what your excellent mother-in-law, that is to be, was thinking of; and I managed the drawing so that she should be my first convert.'

'But what *was* the word, Jack ?

'Well, it's what your man is ringing that bell for, if I am not mistaken—*lunch*.'

ABOUT FORTY.

SOME few weeks ago, I was invited to dine in the Strangers' Room of a certain club in Pall Mall, to meet an old friend of mine who on that very day completed his fortieth year. He had stipulated, our host told us, that none of those present should be younger than himself, and his terms were agreed to, those selected to meet him being in almost all cases one or two years his seniors both in age and university standing, and no one being there who was not at least twoscore.

One impostor, it is true, on the strength of having no gray hairs nor bald places, asserted he was the youngest of the party, and still belonged to the 'T's'; but his claims were clearly shewn to be fallacious, and he subsided after the second glass of champagne, and took his proper place among the 'F's'. This was in accordance with a humorous arrangement of a mathematician of the party, who classed all his friends under the three heads of 'T'; 'F'; and 'S'—'Twenty, Thirty'; 'Forty, Fifty'; 'Sixty, Seventy.'

After all, though, on looking round the table, and observing almost every head was either growing silvery, or 'thinning at the top,' and in some instances both, one was not much disposed to joke on the subject of age. I remember a friend of mine well on in the 'F's' remarking to me some years ago, that I should soon begin to realise that I was growing old by observing that the majority of the people I saw in the streets were younger than myself; and I quite feel the truth of his observation now, though I did not at the time he stated it.

Another thing to be remarked upon a man when he gets to be about forty is, that his future career is pretty well determined, or, at least, a good start in life ought to have been made, if ever it is to be made. The rising barrister has claimed, or is in a position to claim silk. The active curate has become the sleek rector, or, it may be, young archdeacon, or, should he have the gift of popular preaching, in these days of rapid church advancement, may be almost fluttering in lawn. The army man, even in the artillery or line, may hope to be a major at least. The politician, a Junior Lord or Under-secretary, or, in some instances of rare good luck, the head of a department of government.

The literary man should have published more than one successful book, and should be settling down as a polite editor, a caustic reviewer, or a

special correspondent; and, not to multiply examples, the City man about forty should be taking work leisurely, and looking about for a junior partner.

To turn from a man's public life to his private social position—that is usually quite settled at forty, for the majority of men are either married, or accept without offence the designation of 'old bachelor.'

With the exception of our host, who has not yet joined 'the noble army of martyrs,' and myself, who happened to be recently married, every one at table was a Paterfamilias.

Jones, still as cheery and pleasant as he was twenty years ago at Trinity, can count a dozen olive branches round his table.

Smith, who was a young man we looked upon as a somewhat selfish dandy, is now, in dress and demeanour, the quietest man imaginable, a most devoted and attentive husband to a sickly and rather tiresome wife.

Brown, the epicurean of our party, still retains his love for the good things of this world, but finds comparatively little scope to indulge his tastes among his Yorkshire parishioners; for Mrs Brown cares more for the prattle of her fifth daughter than the best dinner she partakes of during her short season in town, and longs to be back to her children again, and out of hot noisy London. I could not help wondering, while sitting among my contemporaries at this dinner, where some met again, for the first time, after many years' interval, how the world had treated my old acquaintances since we were all undergraduates together. Most of those who were my fellow-guests, it was pleasant to see, were prosperous-looking, and some even rather portly men; and we all enjoyed an excellent dinner, the more from the uncommon friendliness which springs from old association.

About forty, one discovers very forcibly that friendship is like good wine, and materially improves with age, and that those we knew fifteen or twenty years ago, we meet with totally different feelings to the acquaintance of the year before last.

I recollect, as a young man, how few friends I knew in the 'F' division at my club, though there were many in the 'S' (looked on as very old men) with whom I was on terms of friendly intimacy. The fact is, about forty, men are usually too busy to think or care about cultivating the acquaintance of younger men than themselves; their contemporaries are sufficiently numerous to give them as much society as they care for, and there exists among them no feeling of sympathy towards those ten years younger than themselves, such as they will probably acquire in after-years.

I have heard it alleged as a reason why a certain club in Pall Mall is not a sociable club, that almost all its members are middle-aged men, and therefore do not assimilate together.

It is, I fancy, when we come to the 'S' or final stage of our journey, and find our old friends sadly thinned by change or death, that we are glad to bestow a kind word or friendly nod on the youths who remind us of a son or nephew, or bring back feelings of vague recollection, and it may be regret, to those far-distant days when, as a certain statesman observes, 'we ourselves were young and curly.'

On the whole, then, 'about forty' must be considered a somewhat solitary period of life, but at the same time it possesses not a few advantages peculiarly its own. It is true that most of the illusions of life have vanished, and that high spirit which carried us through difficulties is effectually sobered; but with a man of sound constitution, who has taken tolerable care of himself, all the substantial advantages of life are left.

His eyesight is probably as keen as ever it was; and he is nearly, if not quite, as good across country as he was ten years ago, though he may ride fifteen stone.

If he be wise, he has given up dancing, though I have met with men considerably past forty, who are such devoted worshippers of Terpsichore, that they still haunt scenes where they formerly distinguished themselves.

Undoubtedly, there is one thing a man ought to have acquired at forty, and that is, the ability to recognise and appreciate a good dinner. I confess I feel nearly as great a contempt for a man of forty who does not care what he eats as I do for a dainty youngster of twenty.

As boys, it is natural we should, as it were, rush upon our chief meal to be in time for the theatre, where we have taken stalls; but, to middle-aged men, the attractions of the drama are less absorbing than they were ten or fifteen years ago, and they have learned that one of the most essential adjuncts to enjoyment at dinner is repose.

On certain matters connected with the table, they have decided opinions—think, for instance, that oysters are always (when in season) the best thing to commence upon; that champagne goes well with cheese; and that dressed fish is a mistake.

Then, again, about forty may be considered physically a safe age; for though people die, of course, at all ages, and thirty-seven is considered, I believe, the average of human life, yet we are not as we were in the days of Edward III., when few gentlemen lived till they were forty, but, on the contrary, have surmounted juvenile disorders, and, with the exception of a hint of approaching gout, are free from the infirmities of age.

So, with all its drawbacks, there is something favourable to be said about forty. Must I confess that when our club party broke up, I was half-oblivious of the lapse of twenty years, and inclined to ask our host: 'Shall you be at morning chapel to-morrow?' but that infliction at least we most of us escape when about forty.

ON AN OLD HARPSICHOORD.

Its varnish cracked, its paintings scarred,
Its dainty gilding sadly marred,
And turned to dingy umber,
It stands forlorn, a waif or stray
Of glories long since passed away,
An ancient piece of lumber.

What more? And yet how rich it is,
This harpsichord, in memories
And quaint associations,
Recalling that far time, when still
High birth and title had their will,
And kings were more than nations;

When gallants wore the true *grand air*—
And wigs, by half a morning's care

Made wondrous smooth and sheeny—
And, while the perfumed pinch they took,
Lisped languid rhapsodies on Glück,
Or, maybe, on Piccini.

I touch the keys—the startled chord
Can scarce a weak response afford
That wakes a low vibration
Among the slackened, palsied strings:
A feeble spell, and yet it brings
A magic transformation.

An antique aspect veils the place,
A weird, oppressive, ghostly grace
That almost makes one tremble;
A mystic light pervades the air,
Faint footfalls gather on the stair—
The belles and beaux assemble.

The belles and beaux? Alas, the ghosts!
Thin shadows of once-reigning toasts,
And heroes of the duel.

They smile, they chatter, they parade,
They rustle in superb brocade,
They shine with many a jewel.

They flirt their fans with pretty airs,
They tap their precious *tabatières*,
They smooth their ruffles grandly;
While here and there an exquisite
Lets fall his studied stroke of wit,
And waits for plaudits blandly.

The harpsichord is quav'ring soon
A minnet's slow triplet-tune.

A courtly powdered couple,
All formal graces, bend and slide,
With court'sies marvellously wide,
And bows politely supple.

The tune is changed, with graceful ease
Fair spirit-fingers sweep the keys,
A spirit voice is trilling;
The passionate *Che farò* strain
Comes, like a half-heard cry of pain
From some far distance thrilling.

The lights go out; the voices die;
Among the strings strange tremors fly,
That slowly sink to slumber;
The harpsichord remains alone,
A monument of glories done,
An ancient piece of lumber.

The Publishers of CHAMBERS'S JOURNAL beg to direct the attention of CONTRIBUTORS to the following notice:
1st. All communications should be addressed to the Editor, 47 Paternoster Row, London.

2d. To insure the return of papers that may prove ineligible, postage-stamps should in every case accompany them.

3d. All MSS. should bear the author's full CHRISTIAN name, surname, and address, legibly written.

4th. MSS. should be written on one side of the leaf only. Unless Contributors comply with the above rules, the Editor cannot undertake to return rejected papers.

Printed and Published by W. & R. CHAMBERS, 47 Paternoster Row, LONDON, and 339 High Street, EDINBURGH. Also sold by all Booksellers.